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## Viewing cable 09CARACAS750, TEN TENETS OF CHAVISMO

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09CARACAS750**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09CARACAS750</a>	2009-06-16 13:23	2011-08-30 01:44	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	Embassy Caracas

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/05/05/113760/wikileaks-us-venezuela-even-fought.html>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CARACAS 000750

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SUBJECT: TEN TENETS OF CHAVISMO

Classified By: CHARGE d'AFFAIRES JOHN P. CAULFIELD, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

**¶1.** This message is the end of tour analysis of the political situation in Venezuela by Embassy Deputy Political Counselor Dan Lawton.

¶ 2. (C) Summary. Despite President Chavez's professed allegiance to socialism, his political project lacks any consistent ideology. Instead, the Venezuelan president exercises an increasingly authoritarian playbook that ensures his unquestioned, indefinite leadership and concentrates more and more power in his hands. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) aggressively defends its democratic legitimacy at the same time that it targets key opposition leaders, polarizes society along political and class lines, and hypes the existence of external and internal enemies to justify repressive measures. Chavez's preference for loyalty over competence, creation of parallel Bolivarian institutions, efforts to forge a one-party state, and chest-thumping nationalism also smack of creeping totalitarianism. Overall, Chavismo poses a serious threat to democracy not just in Venezuela but throughout the region, and it directly competes against U.S. influence in Latin America. Moreover, it is becoming ever more difficult to begin any dialogue with a GBRV increasingly consumed by its own solipsistic "revolutionary" fervor and outsized ambition.  
End Summary.

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One - There Is Only One Great, Indispensable Leader  
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¶ 3. (C) President Chavez has carefully cultivated his own personality cult, such that for most Venezuelan voters, President Chavez embodies Chavismo. Outsized billboards and posters of Chavez dominate public buildings as well as the rallies and campaigns of his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Venezuelans can buy a wide range of Chavez paraphernalia from Chavez action figures to Chavez watches to a compact disc of Chavez singing Venezuelan folk songs. He dominates all state media, which also broadcast his Sunday "Alo, Presidente" talk show. Chavez regularly requires all local television and radio networks to carry his speeches ("cadenas"); he has wracked up over 1200 such hours (50 days) on the air. He has not groomed any successor and he frequently rebukes even his most trusted advisors publicly.

¶ 4. (C) In pursuing the elimination of presidential term limits, Chavez declared publicly numerous times that he is indispensable to his Bolivarian Revolution. While voters rejected his constitutional reform package in December 2007, he succeeded in winning public approval of the elimination of term limits for all elected offices in the February 2009 referendum. Chavez has repeatedly stated that he plans to govern at least until 2020. A corollary to the Venezuelan president's protagonism is that there can be no Chavismo without Chavez. No Chavez supporter who has broken with Chavez has prospered politically. The formerly pro-Chavez Podemos party is all but broken after opposing Chavez's 2007 constitutional reform package. Former Defense Minister Raul Baduel also spoke against indefinite reelection; he is currently sitting in a Caracas military prison awaiting trial on corruption charges.

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Two - Centralize Power  
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¶ 5. (C) Chavez's "Socialism of the 21st Century" exalts the government's active role in the economy and vilifies capitalism, but in the minds of most Venezuelans, it remains a vague notion of a state bearing benefits. The thread that most consistently ties together Chavez's political project is the increasing concentration of power in his hands. Chavez has firm control over all the other branches of government. The opposition foolishly boycotted National Assembly elections in 2005, and currently only approximately 15 former government supporters do not automatically support Chavez in the 167-seat unicameral legislature. With few exceptions, the judiciary rules in favor of the executive branch, even in civil cases bereft of political implications.

¶ 6. (C) Chavez is also squeezing state and local governments

from above and below. He recently promulgated a law that allows the central government to take state control over ports, airports, and highways. The central government has done just that in states run by opposition governors.

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Moreover, Chavez created an appointed position to take over virtually all the functions and budget of the opposition mayor of Caracas. The National Assembly is considering creating presidentially appointed regional vice presidencies that would undermine elected governors. The Venezuelan president also created community councils nationwide which are registered by and report directly to the Office of the Presidency. Chavez diverted 30 percent of state and local discretionary development funds to these community councils.

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Three - Hype External and Internal "Enemies"  
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¶7. (C) Chavez insists on depicting the United States (which he habitually refers to as "The Empire") as Venezuela's enemy. Although most Venezuelans are not anti-American, Chavez's radical foreign policy plays to his base of firm supporters and serves as a convenient rallying cry during Venezuela's frequent elections. Although he holds virtually absolute power in Venezuela, Chavez tries to reframe public perceptions by depicting himself as David fighting Goliath, usually the United States, but also occasionally Spain, Colombia, or Israel. Chavez and other senior GBRV leaders have tempered this script somewhat since the election of President Obama. They tend to praise the President and Secretary personally, while quickly adding that "imperial" political power continues to be exercised in the United States by big business, the military establishment, and the CIA.

¶8. (C) Although domestic opposition to Chavez is weak and disunited, Chavez and senior GBRV officials regularly accuse it of plotting to overthrow or assassinate the Venezuelan president in coordination with the United States. The GBRV does not produce proof or in most cases actually pursue charges; such allegations conveniently serve to circle the wagons within Chavismo, to prevent across-the-aisle political dialogue, and to discredit the opposition. The GBRV regularly reminds voters that large sectors of the opposition participated in the short-lived 2002 coup to give greater credence to current "threats." Chavez also accuses the opposition of doing the USG's bidding, calling them "pitiyanquis." Moreover, government supporters regularly accuse opposition-oriented press outlets of "media terrorism," essentially building the case for continued government harassment of the vestiges of independent media.

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Four - Polarize  
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¶9. (C) Railing against the "oligarchs," Chavez exploits class divisions in stratified Venezuela for political gain. By playing almost exclusively to the over 70% of Venezuelans who are poor, Chavez has maintained a reliable electoral majority (with the exception of the 2007 constitutional referendum vote when many Chavistas abstained). He is not only channeling government resources to the economically disadvantaged, but also prioritizing the GBRV's role in the economy at the expense of the private sector. Such policies squeeze the middle class and are feeding a growing brain drain of professionals, sectors of society traditionally associated with the opposition. They also increase citizens' economic dependence on the GBRV.

¶10. (C) Politically, Chavez tolerates no middle ground. Although increasingly large numbers of voters consider themselves politically neutral, most Venezuelans still habitually self-identify themselves as either with "the

process" or against. Moreover, the GBRV has a good idea where most voters stand. Those that signed the 2004 recall referendum soon found themselves on the infamous "Tascon List" by which the GBRV discriminated in terms of government jobs, contracts, and other benefits. In his speeches, Chavez frequently cites mentor Fidel Castro, bellowing in stark terms, "With the revolution, everything; outside, nothing." After its most recent registration drive, the PSUV claims over seven million members. Local analysts believe the PSUV party list is becoming the "reverse Tascon List" -- if your name is not on it, you cannot expect to get government services (at least not without paying intermediaries).

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Five - Insist on Democratic Credentials  
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¶11. (C) Senior GBRV leaders insist that "participatory"

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democracy is superior to "representative" democracy. They contend that real democracies give priority to "social rights" and argue that concepts such as checks and balances and institutional autonomy are discredited "bourgeois" concepts. Chavez also regularly stresses that he has held national elections almost yearly since he was first elected in 1998, blurring any distinction between being elected democratically and governing democratically. Anxious to preserve their democratic legitimacy at home and abroad, Chavez and senior GBRV officials lash out immediately and disproportionately to any criticism of GBRV abuses. They traditionally dismiss any criticism as interference in Venezuela's domestic affairs and insult or try to discredit any government or organization that faults the GBRV (without ever engaging on the substance of the critique). The GBRV forcibly expelled a Human Rights Watch leader and a member of the European Parliament when they publicly took issue with the GBRV's human rights record while in Caracas.

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Six - Reward Loyalty Over Competence  
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¶12. (C) The single most important common characteristic of Chavez's ministers and other senior officials is their unquestioning loyalty to the Venezuelan president. He tends to rotate a small coterie of firm supporters through senior positions, simultaneously rewarding his inner circle while preventing them from accruing either real expertise or an independent power base. A substantial portion of Chavez's appointed officials participated in his failed 1992 military coup. Moreover, Chavez retains loyalists despite their poor administrative or electoral track records. He named Diosadado Cabello, who last year lost his re-election for the Miranda Governorship, to be Minister of Infrastructure and Telecommunications. Chavez appointed Jessie Chacon Information Minister after he lost the mayoral race in the Sucre borough of Caracas. By contrast, Chavez's PSUV temporarily expelled Henri Falcon, the then widely hailed competent mayor of Barquisimeto, only to quickly reinstate him after it became obvious that Falcon would win the governorship of Lara State in 2008 with or without the PSUV's endorsement.

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Seven - Repress Selectively  
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¶13. (C) The GBRV picks its political victims carefully, making examples of sector leaders. Such calibrated repression has so far avoided any significant public backlash while at the same time created a climate of fear in civil society and fostered self-censorship in the media. Examples abound. The GBRV recently pressed corruption charges against Maracaibo Mayor and 2006 consensus opposition presidential

candidate Manuel Rosales; Rosales fled to Peru where he was granted asylum. The GBRV jailed Carlos Ortega, the leader of the largest opposition trade union confederation. He escaped from military prison in 2006 and was also granted asylum in Peru. The GBRV closed the only critical free-to-air television network in 2007 and is threatening to do the same to opposition-oriented cable news network Globovision. Prominent electoral NGO Sumate has been subject to numerous government investigations. Chavez and other senior GBRV officials have blasted prominent Catholic Church officials for defending democracy, and pro-Chavez thugs briefly occupied the Cardinal's residence in downtown Caracas.

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Eight - Create Parallel Structures  
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¶14. (C) Over the last ten years, the GBRV and its supporters and allies have created new bodies and institutions in an effort to undermine and outflank organizations that it could neither control nor co-opt. Domestically, the GBRV and its adherents have spawned pro-government NGOs, business groups, labor unions, television and radio networks, and even a socialist spin-off of the Catholic Church. Chavez's social programs ("misiones") generally sidestep and starve long established government ministries of resources. Internationally, Chavez is endeavoring to establish multilateral organizations that both magnify Venezuela's influence and combat purported "U.S. imperialism." From the GBRV's perspective, ALBA, Petrocaribe, UNASUR, and the Bank of the South are tools with which to supplant or weaken the OAS, IMF, and the World Bank.

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Nine - Party Equals State  
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¶15. (C) Since creating the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in 2007, President Chavez has been trying to forge a one-party state. Chavez uses government resources, especially state media, and pressures the over two million government employees to support the Venezuelan president, PSUV candidates, and his referendum proposals during elections. The National Electoral Council (CNE) staffs PSUV registration drives. Chavez demanded that all pro-government parties join the PSUV, but three parties, the Communist Party (PCV), Patria Para Todos (PPT), and the Podemos party, declined. Podemos later joined the opposition in 2007. The PSUV declined to support any PPT or PCV gubernatorial and mayoral candidates in the 2008 state and local elections and neither party now exercises any meaningful local power. Moreover, the National Assembly is seriously considering an electoral law that would almost certainly expand the PSUV's absolute legislative majority and diminish the influence of the PPT and PCV after the 2010 parliamentary elections.

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Ten - Monopolize Nationalism  
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¶16. (C) Calling himself the heir to Venezuelan founder Simon Bolivar, Chavez asserts exclusive claim to Venezuela's forefathers and national symbols. He regularly cites Bolivar and other national heroes out of context, insisting that they were early socialists. One of Chavez's stock stump speech messages is that his Bolivarian Revolution liberated Venezuela from being an American colony and will make Venezuela a world power in coming decades. In contrast, Chavez and his supporters depict the opposition as unpatriotic, stateless, or paid U.S. agents. Chavez's own exaggerated demonstrations of patriotism conveniently distract public attention from local problems or demonstrate incontrovertibly that he can do what he wants. In 2006, Chavez added a star to the Venezuelan flag and flipped the

horse on the national seal to make it run left, not right. In 2007, he eliminated three zeros from the currency and changed its name from "bolivars" to "strong bolivars." He also added the prefix "People's Power" to all ministries and ordered all Venezuelan clocks changed by thirty minutes to create a unique Venezuelan time zone. In 2008, he suggested that he would exhume Bolivar's body to prove that he was poisoned (He has not done so yet).

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Comment  
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¶17. (C) The increasingly authoritarian nature of Chavismo, not to mention its habitual and politically convenient vilification of the United States, pose considerable challenges to any effort to improve bilateral ties. Chavez and other senior GBRV officials publicly express interest in greater dialogue with the USG, but the reality is that to date, the GBRV has been reluctant to create meaningful and easily accessible channels of communication, let alone engage substantively on issues that should be of common interest. The GBRV also makes it clear that it will not accept or look past any USG criticism, however well-founded or required by congressionally-mandated reports or testimony. Facing no checks on his power at home, Chavez craves international attention and influence abroad. Whether it is funneling arms and money to the FARC, sending suitcases of money to the Kirchner campaign in Argentina, or exporting elements of Chavismo to ALBA countries, to name just a few prominent examples, Chavez's outsized ambition backed by petrodollars makes Venezuela an active and intractable U.S. competitor in the region.

CAULFIELD